

# Marketplace

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## Is an enviromaniac loose in your office?



While studies show that most workers want their firms to do more for the environment, some individual employees are going above and beyond the call of the carbon footprint. Beth Teitell reports.

### TEXT OF STORY

Recycling bin (iStockPhoto)

#### **KAI RYSSDAL:**

Office politics usually breaks down along traditional lines -- red for Republicans, blue for Democrats. But even though we're smack in the middle of election season, there's a new color to consider around the water cooler. Green. Really green. While studies do show that most workers want their firms to do more for the environment, some individual employees are going above and beyond the call of the carbon footprint.

From the Marketplace Sustainability desk, Beth Teitell reports.

#### **BETH TEITELL:**

Rita Dalton is an executive assistant at the Charles Hotel in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She's also her department's green cop, policing the company's recycling program. Every day, she goes through the contents of the blue plastic bins in the back office.

Her colleagues at the hotel are supposed to separate paper from plastic, but Dalton regularly finds violations: salad containers filled with lettuce and feta cheese, used tissues, staples . . .

**RITA DALTON:** There is gum. I was right. Peppermint maybe. I don't know.

**TEITELL:** Maybe you should do a breath test around here.

Dalton started off using inspirational quotes urging co-workers to "be the change you want to see in the world." But when that failed, she switched tactics.

#### **DALTON:**

I just generally make comments about how stupid people are and make sure I do it loud enough so that everyone in the office can hear.

Office workers, brace yourselves: The enviromaniacs are on the loose. They're rummaging through co-workers'

trash, haranguing colleagues who don't take public transit, turning off bathroom lights before the stalls are empty.

In some offices, only the brave dare to take a Styrofoam cup from the cafeteria or print out an e-mail. It's no wonder that veteran human resources consultant Nancy Nelson sees the environment as the next workplace battleground, pitting workers who consider bottled water a civil right against those who see it as a crime against humanity.

**NANCY NELSON:** People are becoming emotionally charged about green issues.

How charged? Well, here's what Henry Santoro, news director of WFNX in Boston, says about his office's self-appointed green cop:

**HENRY SANTORO:**

She's the Osama Bin Laden of green terrorists. If she saw you throw away a plastic fork, she would take that fork out of the trash and come after you with it. And then she'd rinse it off and recycle it. She can look at you and know whether or not you've been a good recycler today.

When a green monster is on the prowl no one's safe, not even other environmentalists, says Lorelei Grazier, the organizer of a green convention in Boston.

**LORELEI GRAZIER:**

Twice in the past two months I've attended sustainable conferences, and at both conferences during the Q& A someone had to stand up and let us all know we could be doing this in a more sustainable manner, that we could have a webinar. So, we were all publicly shamed for being there.

To be fair, many green enforcers mean well. But others? Well, they're using the Earth for their own nefarious purposes, says Kit Yarrow, a consumer psychologist at Golden Gate University in San Francisco.

**KIT YARROW:**

I'm calling it the dark green movement that is just blatantly hostile. The point is not really protecting the environment, the point is an opportunity to be able to feel superior to someone else and to kind of get off on releasing a little bit of anger.

Then there are those in-between like Rita Dalton, the hotel employee -- neither ruthlessly dogmatic nor acting out her frustrations in the name of the cause.

**DALTON:**

I can hear the eyes rolling when I walk away sometimes. But I'm just a frustrated worker trying to keep the recycling bins clean and empty. I'm not really a Nazi.

In Boston, this is Beth Teitell for Marketplace.

## COMMENTS

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By Nick Fields  
From CO, 08/26/2008

Sven, I don't think you noticed that she tried to be nice at first, but people just didn't follow the rules. Honestly, it's not about elitism for most environmentalist employees, it's more about, "Hey, it's my planet too" mentality. If people can just change their habits a little, we can do a lot of good around here...

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By Sven Granholm

From Belfast, ME, 08/26/2008

Rita Dalton needs to hear the old adage that "you catch more bees with honey than with vinager... There are plenty of people (like me) who would hear her complaining loudly for all to hear about how "stupid people are" and laugh to ourselves as we walk past the paper bin and throw our used tissues in for her to dig out. Her enviro-elitism would probably be more productive if instead of "inspirational quotes " or ridicule she tried a good old-fashion "Please".

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